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Christianity and Islam among the Mossi¹

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797 THE twin forces of Christianity and Islam are both seriously contending for the conversion of the pagan masses of the Western Sudan. Islam first penetrated this region during the 11th century and succeeded in converting many people to its faith. Christianity arrived on the scene only 60 years ago, and has not had the time to win many converts. However, there remained many societies in this area which were largely pagan until European conquests exposed them almost simultaneously to the influences of both Christianity and Islam. One such society, the Mossi, has been described as the principal island of resistance to Islam in the Sudan (Gouilly 1952:52). André (1924:31) states that the Mossi "offered to the Animists an irreducible rampart against the invasion of Islam." And Delafosse concurs that the Mossi "seem to have been particularly hostile to Islam which has made no progress among them since the Hegira. And although an appreciable number of Moslem strangers (Yarsé) lived among them, they have almost all remained pagans" (1912, vol. 3:187).

The first Christian Catholic missionaries arrived in Mossi territory in 1900, just four years after French conquest. These missionaries were kindly if fearfully received by the people, who gave them land for building a mission and for cultivating crops. The Mossi helped the Christians cultivate these crops and willingly allowed the children to attend the mission school. Nevertheless, when the missionaries tried to convert the children to Catholicism, the parents objected and withdrew the children from school (Socquet 1956:62). The Protestant American "Assemblies of God" mission first worked among the Mossi in 1926, and in 1931 they reported that the outlook for conversions was "hopeful" (Cooksey and McLeish 1931:215). But from 1926 to date, the Protestants have made negligible progress in their conversions. There are today about 155,000 Moslems, 26,000 Catholics, and 1,760 Protestants in a Mossi population of over 1,500,000. These figures attest to the fact that despite a long history of resistance to foreign religious systems, many Mossi are now abandoning their traditional religion. But the figures also show that while Islam is gaining many converts, the Catholics are making only slight progress, and the American Protestants hardly any at all. There are obviously many reasons for the differential advance of these three religious systems. In this paper I will examine and analyze the processes by which these religious systems attempt to gain converts, and delineate the reasons for their differential success.

173 The Mossi who are now feeling the impact of external religious influences
105 represent the unique example of a Sudanese group which has preserved its
[186] ethnic identity and political autonomy through all the vicissitudes of Sudanic
history until French conquest in 1896. Tradition records that the first Mossi

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rulers left the Dagomba region in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) during the 11th century and moved into the bend of the Niger River, carving out three large kingdoms and smaller principalities in the process. At the head of these still extant kingdoms are rulers (*Moro Nabas*) who hold feudal-like control of the provinces, districts, and villages which comprise their domains. A complex hierarchical administrative apparatus extends the power of the rulers into the smallest village, and funnels taxes and tribute back to them. French conquest modified this highly efficient system but did not greatly change it. The Mossi state apparatus rests on an economy which produces cotton cloth, horses, sheep, cattle, and goats, but the main support of this large population—one of the densest in the Sudan—is grain agriculture. Today, some Mossi districts still have as many as 70 persons per square mile. 105 173

The Mossi are divided into stratified royal, noble, and commoner patrilineages. Characteristic of this lineage system is a process by which royal sub-lineages descend serially until they merge with the mass of commoner lineages. Below the lineages there were once large non-Mossi groups of serfs and slaves, but these people have now been grouped into lineages and have become Mossi. Patrilocal polygynous extended family households, grouped into villages, form the basic Mossi settlement pattern. Marriages are arranged between unrelated persons through the agency of lineage members who establish "friendly" relationships. The two friends might ask their lineage heads for women to exchange as wives, or the "friend" who has received more gifts from his opposite number will give over a wife. Because only the older men have women and goods at their disposal, they are usually the ones who receive wives. The result is that most young men have no wives and must content themselves with occasional lovers until they inherit wives from lineage members. The Mossi have a great fear of incestuous relations which bring down the wrath of the ancestors (the *Keemse*).

Ancestor veneration is at the core of Mossi religious behavior. The recent ancestors are notified, through sacrifices, of the important events in the lives of their descendants, and they are expected to aid in solving everyday problems. The ancestors also invoke their sanctions against antisocial behavior among their descendants. Once a year the Mossi people, in concert with the Moro Nabas, appeal to their individual and collective ancestors for good crops, large families, and for the preservation of the dynasty. Often associated with the ancestors as propitiatory agents are local deities called *Tengkougas* (sing. *Tenkougwe*) or earth shrines, visibly manifested by clumps of trees, mountains, rocks, or rivers. *Tengsobas* or earth priests appeal to the *Tengkougas* on behalf of the local populations for help in sickness, for rain and good crops, and for children. When proper sacrifices are offered to the *Tengkougas*, their spiritual agents, called *kinkirsé*, enter the wombs of women and are born as children. Twins and children who die young are regarded as "evil" *kinkirsé* who entered a woman without being invited. Nevertheless, many persons consider twins as special gifts to parents in favor of the earth deities. 769 [778] [842] [845]

The earth itself, *Tenga*, is one of the principal deities of the Mossi. *Tenga* is 776 [823]

776 considered the wife of a male deity called *Winnam*, *Windé*, or *Noba Zidiwindé*. The true nature of *Winnam* is not clear. The Mossi say: "*Winnam* is the sun, and *Winnam* is God"; he is considered a sun god as well as a supreme deity. [775] *Winnam* is venerated but he is not feared, because it is the dead ancestors who chastise evil-doers by affliction or death. When wicked people die they face the wrath of the ancestors in *Keemstlenga*, or land of the ancestors.

774 The Mossi have several concepts of the spiritual essence or animating principle of man. First there is the *seega* (pl. *seesé*), an entity found in all living beings; it leaves the body during sleep, and its adventures provide the dreams of men. The *seega* can be captured during its nocturnal wanderings or in places where large crowds congregate. If the *seega* is captured and eaten by a [76] sorcerer, its owner will die. A man's shadow is also called his *seega*; persons about to die have no shadows, since their *seesé* have either been stolen or have [822] left on their own account.

775 Another principle called the *keema* (pl. *keemsé*) is associated with the dead or with persons about to die. The *keema* of a dying man wanders around and often frightens people; as soon as he is dead, he is no longer referred to by name but is called the "*keema*." *Keemsé* is also the word used for the generalized [769] ancestors who sanction the behavior of the living and who must be placated if people wish to have enough food, wives, children, and good health. A man's own *keemsé* take a vital interest in his affairs, in return for which they receive nourishment in the form of the *seesé* (animals do not have *keemsé*) of sacrificed animals.

[827] The breath, called *vousem*, is also considered an animating principle by the Mossi and, since it leaves the body through the nose at death, they believe that a man's nose is the first thing to die. It is not clear how the *seega* is disposed of when the body dies. Some people say it remains forever about the haunts of man; others believe that it goes to a mountain called *Plimpikou* and disappears into a cavern. Still others believe that the *seega* becomes the *keema* and goes to *Plimpikou*, from whence the *keemsé* come to visit their descendants. It is difficult to determine whether the Mossi have always been vague about their traditional religious concepts or whether this uncertainty is the result of the influx of such foreign creeds as Islam and Christianity.

175 The first recorded contact between the Mossi and Moslems took place
797 around 1328 when the Yatenga Mossi attacked, burned, and sacked Timbuktu, then held by the Dia dynasty of the Songhoi (Dubois 1896:251). For more than a century afterward, the Mossi pursued a turbulent and aggressive policy in the region of the Niger bend, pushing as far as Gourma, Walata, and Banku (ibid:127). They were finally defeated and routed by Sonni Ali in 1477. In 1499, when Askia the Great (El Hadj Mohammed ben Abou Bekr, usurper of the Songhoi throne from the Sonni dynasty in 1494) returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca, he launched a *jihad* or holy war on the Mossi who had rejected his ultimatum to adopt Islam. Askia defeated the Mossi, "devastated the towns and countryside, took men, women, and children as prisoners, and forcibly converted these captives to Islam" (Dubois 1896:127-128). The

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pagan Mossi and the Moslem Songhoi fought several other battles until Songhoi power was broken by the Moroccans, who conquered Timbuktu in 1590. 175
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The Moslems made no further attempt to convert the Mossi by force, but Moslem pressure did not stop; it now came in the peaceful guise of Moslem merchants and Yarsé Moslem refugees from the Mandingo cities such as Timbuktu and Djenne, who received permission from the Mossi rulers to settle in the country. However, judging from the reports of the first Europeans to reach the Mossi, the Moslems lived under many restrictions and were forbidden by the Moro Nabas to recite their prayers in public places (Tauxier 1912:585-586). Despite these restrictions, the Moslems were able to extend their influence through conversion of the cadet sons of the rulers and conversion of at least one ruler of the Ouagadougou Mossi dynasty.

About 1780 Naba Kom, the son of Zombré and a Yarsé Moslem woman, permitted the Yarsé to live in the villages and sent one of them to the Gold Coast for religious instruction. His son, Naba Sagha, was involved in a civil war and replaced some dissident pagan district chiefs with his Moslem sons. The present ruling lineage of Nobéré (where I worked) is descended from Ngado, one of these sons.² But although the rulers permitted their younger sons to adopt Islam, they themselves and the heirs to the thrones remained pagan in order to maintain the bonds with the ancestors. The exception to this rule was Doulougou, the grandson of Sagha, who was elected Moro Naba despite being a Moslem. Now the spread of Islam was given new impetus: Yarsé proselyting increased, mosques were built in Ouagadougou and in the villages, and many Koranic schools were founded. But with Doulougou's death the rulers reverted to paganism and Moslem influence declined. Nevertheless, the learned Moslem Imams continued to serve at court and used their knowledge of the outside world for the benefit of the rulers.

The Moslem Mossi showed the greatest hostility to the first Europeans who arrived in the country. The Imam of Yako, under the influence of his Tidjani son (who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca), refused to have any dealings with Europeans. Furthermore, he convinced the Moro Naba that death awaited any ruler who granted an audience to a European. When the French attacked the Mossi in 1896, an Imam from Béré, a former pilgrim, told the ruler to flee and not depend on his ill-equipped soldiers to defeat the gun-bearing invaders. Lamberth reported that the Moslems told the defeated and demoralised Mossi that "as soon as all the blacks become Moslems, the whites will leave" (Tauxier 1912:792).

No one knows how many Moslems were in Ouagadougou when the French arrived. Delafosse (1912, vol. 3:193) records that around the turn of the century there were about 42 Koranic schools with 230 students scattered around the country. Tauxier (1912:793), writing about the same period, states that there were 33 Koranic schools with about 358 students. No Koranic schools were reported for the Nobéré and Manga districts, but I know that there were several in the neighboring district of Béré. In 1926 there were 70 Koranic 175
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175 schools and 4,000 Moslems in Ouagadougou (seven percent of whom were non-Mossi). By 1944 there were about 240 schools and approximately 25,000
797 Moslems. The last census, 1954, did not record the number of Koranic schools
871 but gave the figure of 60,000 Moslems in the Ouagadougou region.³ The 4,000 Moslems of Nobéré comprise 42 percent of that district's population. With the exception of one Catholic school master and the Catholic catechist who came to the district during 1956, the population is pagan. It might be relevant to point out that Nobéré has the highest percentage of Moslems in Kombissiri, an administrative unit (a subdivision) which has 152,000 pagans, 23,000 Moslems, 3,000 Catholics, and about 100 Protestants.

797 As noted above, Islam first came into the Nobéré district with Ngado, who replaced a dissident pagan chief, but Ngado's lineal descendants reverted to
634 paganism until a few years ago when the present district chief became a nominal Moslem. The cadet sons of Ngado did not revert to paganism, and today all the noble sublineages of the district are Moslem. We may note here that one of the main aspects of Islamic proselytization in this district, as elsewhere among the Mossi, has been the conversion of persons who do not hold strategic positions vis-à-vis the ancestors. The present chief is no exception to this rule, because he is only a nominal Moslem. His eldest son is the only one in the family who is not a Moslem—a status which is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a growing Moslem population. The chief himself became partially converted to Islam in gratitude to a Moslem Hausa trader who cured his illness. He recites the five daily prayers and observes most of the prescriptions of Islam, but he still drinks European beer, subscribes to many pagan rites and beliefs, and supervises the annual Péléga or sacrifice to the ancestors. This dual allegiance is politically expedient because the chief can function as the head of the Moslem community as well as the traditional head of all the people. He does have occasional difficulty with intolerant Moslems who wish him to become a devout Moslem, and with the traditionalists who claim that today the crops are smaller, the people sicker, and the women barren because of the neglect of the ancestors. However, with the approach of holy days, these differences are resolved in the interest of community harmony.

622 The chiefs of the villages under the overall command of the district chief are mainly pagan, since they are descended from the district chief replaced by
797 Ngado. Yet they command villages inhabited by the noble Moslem sublineages
769 of the ruling house as well as by commoner lineages. The village chief cannot become a Moslem because he too is responsible for sacrifices to the ancestors, without whose help his people would suffer. He does not take an active part in Moslem festivities, but receives the homage due a chief from the Moslems on these and other occasions. However, most village chiefs show an interest in Moslem affairs, and one of them, the chief of Vool, has a prayer-circle (misseri) for Moslems who came to pay homage.

622 The pivotal role which the village chief plays in the exchange of wives be-
797 tween Moslems and pagans has led indirectly to the increase of the Moslem
582 population. Before the French conquest he gave the Moslems more wives than

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he received from them. This unequal exchange, plus the nobles' prerogative of seizing the wives of pagans, contributed to the increase of the Moslems.

The conversion of Mossi to Islam is sometimes accompanied by a rupture in the relationships between persons involved in "friendships" with a view of obtaining wives. A great quarrel developed in the district between a pagan chief and a recent convert who refused to give the chief a daughter promised as a wife. The chief became furious and claimed that the Moslem had broken a promise made years ago, but the Moslem claimed that it was against his new religion to give his daughter to a pagan. It is not true that Moslems in the village do not exchange wives with pagans, but the Moslems often try to convert their pagan friends so that the brides will not have to revert to paganism. The chief's difficulty was that he could not become a Moslem because of his ritual and ceremonial relationship with the ancestors. The Moslem men do not have such difficulties with their pagan wives because most women follow their husbands' dictates in religious and other matters. Many Moslem men attempt to prevent their wives from having sacrifices made to the ancestors, but if a woman really wishes such a sacrifice she can easily have it arranged through her pagan relatives. If a woman married to a Moslem refuses to observe Islamic practices, she is liable to divorce and runs the risk of having her children taken away.

Mossi anxiety over children is often instrumental in converting them to Islam. When a woman is barren or her young children die, she consults a soothsayer (*barga*). She is either told that her Tengkougre benefactor was not amply rewarded and recalled the children, or that her "Moslem" children (children who wished to be Moslems) were angry because they were given pagan names. In the latter case she is advised to make a gift to a Moslem and to ask her husband to build a Moslem prayer-circle outside his hut so that when her children "return" (are born again) they will see it. Finally, she is advised to give all her children Moslem names. I could discover no reason why the pagan soothsayers advise these anxious parents to adopt Islam, except that they hope that complicated prescriptions will be more efficacious. Nevertheless, so effective is this technique for gaining converts to Islam that even members of the family of the chief pagan priest are not immune to it. Furthermore, once a woman has a Moslem child, all her other children must be Moslems or they will die. A man whose children are all Moslem has no recourse except to adopt Islam if he wants a funeral, because his Moslem sons may not give him a pagan funeral.

Every Mossi, whether Moslem or non-Moslem, wishes a proper funeral, and now that travel has increased the fact of being Moslem or pagan is of great importance. Many young migrants to Ashanti have reported that their dead pagan comrades were unceremoniously disposed of, while the local Christians and Moslems took care of their dead coreligionists. But despite this fact, and the belief of administrators and missionaries, I found no evidence that the seasonal and other migration of Mossi youth to Ghana and the Ivory Coast have contributed very much to the spread of Islam. It is true that some of the thou-

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sands of Mossi who fled their homeland to escape forced labor or military service ultimately returned as Moslems, but the majority of seasonal migrants do not have enough contact with foreign populations for them to become Moslems. Most of the Mossi who migrate to Ghana work on cocoa farms far removed from large centers of population. It is also true that even those Mossi who worked for Moslems on the farms and found it expedient to "pray" (as the Mossi refer to conversion to Islam) soon reverted to paganism on their return in order to escape the displeasure of their lineage members. I have recorded several cases of pagans who became Moslems only when they returned from abroad to find their relatives all converted to Islam.

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Today there are obvious rewards for those Mossi who embrace Islam; besides such tangible rewards as getting wives and children, there are the intangible ones of upward social mobility and greater prestige. It is important to note that most liberated slaves and serfs are now Moslems. Formerly these non-Mossi had low status, but today those who have been to Mecca bear such proud titles as *Hadji*. On the night before Ramadan, one of these men gave a talk before the Nobéré chief during which he chided the chief for his impiety and voiced the hope that the next chief would be a true Moslem. He admitted that the chief might interpret such a speech from a former serf as impertinence, but he begged him to accept the censure as coming from the servant of *Nabiyoma* (the prophet). This same man had refused to pay homage to the chief at the annual sacrifice to the ancestors, and when admonished returned the daughter which the chief had given him as a wife. In earlier days a chief would not have given a daughter to a serf, and moreover, a disrespectful serf could be killed instantly.

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Many French administrators and Christian missionaries allege that Mossi youth embrace Islam because they like the beautiful robes and red fezzes of the Moslems, but this is a naive explanation for the conduct of a highly sophisticated people. Most young men in Nobéré wear Moslem-type clothes because such clothes are the mode. Now that sun helmets, dark glasses, and women's raincoats with hoods are in vogue, pagans as well as Moslems wear them. What is of interest, however, is that when pagans become Moslems they wear cleaner clothes and affect a different style of life.

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The local consensus is that Moslems are much better behaved than pagans because they do not swear, fight, or get drunk in public. The man chosen as Imam is required to have such characteristics as mercy toward evil-doers, benevolence, magnanimity, physical beauty, and virility. Yet many Mossi say that the Moslems can be worse than any other people. They accuse them of being charlatans, of selling Koranic verses as charms, and of committing murder by the use of magical formulae. Neither pagans nor Moslems believe that a man is necessarily good because he recites his daily prayers or goes to Mecca.

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Moslems in the district follow most precepts of their religion: they recite the five daily prayers according to the rites of Tidjani (there are only two Moslems of the Hamada sect in the district and no members of the Hamallist sect), give alms to the poor, observe the month-long fast (called by the Mossi the

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Karême), celebrate the great festival of Ramadan and the lesser festivals, and 794
aspire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Most of the Moslems can lead pray-
ers, but only about one-tenth of their number can read and recite the Koran. [212]
However, today the masters (*karasambas*) of the 32 Koranic schools in the dist-
rict are endeavoring to instruct the many boys and few girls in reading the [87]
Koran and understanding Moslem theology.

The *Karême* is observed by most adult Moslems in the community with
the exception of invalids and working men. Moslems say that the fast is in-
tended to turn the minds of the people to God, and they distinguish between
the Moslems "of the mouth" who break the fast and those "of the heart" who [184]
fast until Ramadan. The crescent moon of Ramadan is greeted with guns and
general rejoicing and the following morning the Moslems gather at the tomb of
Ngado to give praises to God; during the rest of the day they pay homage to
the chief and visit their friends. However, a change in the traditional observ-
ance of Ramadan is expected, because one of the Moslem leaders objects to the [178]
ceremony at the tomb of Ngado. He feels that some Moslems are beginning to
regard the tomb of the first Moslem as an earth shrine or *Tengkougre*.

So far, only five of the more prominent Moslems in the district have made 794
or are making the pilgrimage to Mecca. The first man made the voyage about
seven years ago, and is now conducting a Koranic school in a neighboring dis-
trict. His brother went to Mecca about two years ago and is now the senior
El Hadj in the district. Of the two men who were on the pilgrimage when I
arrived in the district, one has since died near the Red Sea and the other is still
away. One other man left for Mecca and returned to the district during my
stay. Most of the pilgrims now fly to Mecca; only two men followed the tradi-
tional route through Ghana, Kano, Lake Chad, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan
(now Sudan), and on to Mecca. In general, all pilgrims have used their own re- [613]
sources for the trip, but they receive some help from their lineage brothers and
from the other Moslems in the district and in Ouagadougou.

The pilgrimage to Mecca represents the greatest event in the lives of the
district Moslems. When the last pilgrim left, a great crowd gathered at his
house and prayed for his safe journey, and some even accompanied him to
Ouagadougou and remained there until he left. The Moslems and many pagans [621]
of the district, under the command of the district chief, cultivated his fields
during his absence. And when the new *El Hadj* returned, a large crowd accom-
panied him to his house with shouts of joy. There he killed a sheep in thanks- [782]
giving, sprinkled the crowd with holy water from Mecca, and recounted his ex-
periences. His listeners were impressed by his airplane flight and the descrip-
tion of Mecca, but they showed the greatest interest when he said that Mecca
women covered their faces and that most Meccan men were monogamous. The
local Moslems smiled when they heard this bit of news from one of their mem-
bers, but I have seen them scowl when discussing the monogamous practice de-
sired by the Christians.

The attitudes of Moslems differ very little from those of the other Mossi
as regards children and polygyny. They say that they do not believe in the
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794 efficacy of ancestor veneration and do not "kill chickens" to the ancestors, but
595 they maintain that it is a man's duty to have many wives so that he may have
842 children to succeed him. Furthermore, since Mohammed himself decreed that
his followers may keep four wives, provided they treat each with the same de-
gree of kindness, there is no conflict between Islamic tenets and Mossi practice
of polygny. The average Moslem has two wives, but even the few men in the
district who have more than four wives do not appear overly concerned about
transgressing the tenets of their faith. Mossi Moslems have not adopted the
[582] paternal parallel cousin marriage so common among other Moslems, and show
surprise when told that Islam permits such marriages. However, they have
modified their marriage behavior to harmonize with what they consider an
Islamic tenet that "a man should not marry the widow of his father." The
Moslem Mossi profess to look with horror on these marriages among their
pagan brothers, preferring the levirate instead.

794 The Moslems' attitude toward the low status of women in Mossi society
562 has not changed, and in one respect it can even be said that this attitude has
been strengthened. Many Moslem wives now cover their faces, and many El
Hadjis have attempted to place their wives in purdah by preventing them
from going to the market for fear they would come in contact with pagan men.
The development of this practice is running counter to the growing emancipa-
tion of Mossi women, who have just begun to leave their villages for periodic
visits to the larger towns. Nevertheless, the important fact is that the Mecca
pilgrims have the opportunity to see Moslem women playing roles which are
forbidden or unknown to Mossi women. And while it is true that the Mossi
pilgrims would not easily adopt and foster monogamy, their receptivity to new
Islamic beliefs and customs might have a liberating effect on their treatment of
women. Once institutional and cultural changes have been accepted by the El
Hadjis, they are likely to spread quite rapidly throughout the society because
men who have visited Mecca are believed to have returned filled with wisdom
and understanding.

797 Christianity came to the Mossi on January 24, 1900, shortly after French
conquest. As noted above, the first missionaries were well treated, but the
Mossi balked at the attempts at conversion. Nevertheless, by 1919 the White
Fathers of the Catholic missions had established several centers, among
which was the district of Manga where this study was conducted. Manga is
considered a Catholic district, but there are only 3,000 Catholics out of a popu-
lation of 124,000—which also includes 9,200 Moslems and five Protestants.
[189] Thus, in contrast to Moslem Nobéré, which has no Catholics or Protestants,
Manga, like most districts in Mossi territory, has a Moslem community.

The conversion of the Mossi in Manga to Catholicism follows the classical
pattern of missionary proselytization in the country. Monsignor Socquet
(1956:62) states that the Mossi always react to attempts at conversion with
the statement: " 'We are looking at our chief,' that is to say, 'We will follow
our chief in conversion as in all other matters. If he is favorable to it, then we
will not go against his will.' " Socquet concludes: "It is thus understandable

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how important is the conversion of the chiefs, or, at least, their sympathy for our religion, in the spread of Catholicism." The missionaries may have been successful in the village of the Manga district chief because he was sympathetic to them, but they made few converts in the villages far from the district center or in the neighboring districts. In the Béré district, a few miles from Manga, the Catholics have made only 22 converts despite more than 15 years' work. In Manga, however, they were able to "recruit" most of the young children for their church and school. When an old man was asked why his children became Catholic, he tried to evade the question but finally replied that he did not control the minds of his children. Knowing the nature of administrative practice in the upper Volta before 1946, and the nature of Mossi family structure, we looked further for the answer. 797 626 [871]

Paradoxically, it comes from a Catholic missionary, André Dupont, who, seeking to discover the reason for the decrease of patients in the Catholic-controlled maternity clinics, asked: [743]

Why have the maternity clinics which in 1942 served more than seventy mothers a month now serve only two or three? "We are no longer forced to go," reply the villagers. Was it the fear of sanction which accounted for the unanimous use of the clinics? Alas! It would seem to be so. The use of force and sanction have rendered odious an institution of charity. It would have been better if the mothers were only encouraged to use the clinics. "These natives do not understand," I am told sometimes. But how does one expect them to understand? (Dupont 1949:4)

Fear was certainly one of the reasons why the people in Manga embraced Catholicism. Before 1946 (the Brazzaville conference in 1944 abolished forced labor), men and women were recruited for work on the roads and on Ivory Coast plantations, and children were recruited for the schools. The district chiefs often gathered orphans and the children of their former serfs and sent them to the mission to fill the quotas, but many children and whole families voluntarily attached themselves to the missions. The reasons for so doing are legion, but in some cases it was simply the desire to accept the new religious faith. 797 [466]

Once at the mission the children were taught French and the tenets of Catholicism. Many of the boys later became catechists or priests and several girls went into the nunnery. However, the largest group of educated youths became the clerical personnel of the administration and were lost to missionary activity. Because the administration lacked French-speaking Mossi, the young people received good jobs. This desertion to the administration has become so serious that the missionaries at Manga have ceased to teach French to their catechists and now use the vernacular. 797 555 [871]

Conversion to Catholicism, bringing with it the knowledge of French, was formerly one of the sure roads to upward social mobility. Most Catholic teachers at Manga (and at Nobéré) are individuals who were recruited as unwilling school-boys but today are the highest paid members of their lineages. Other gains have accrued to persons who become Catholics. For example, the people at Manga believe that the missionaries used their influence with the

797 administration to have one of their converts, a younger son of the late chief,
555 elected to the district chieftainship over his elder brother. This belief is prob-
ably unfounded, since the Moro Naba seems to be electing the literate sons of
chiefs to their fathers' positions so that educated chiefs, and not educated
commoners, can serve as members of French parliamentary bodies. Un-
fortunately, the people of Manga do not understand modern political prob-
lems, and have accepted the new chief only because of their traditional respect
for the chieftainship.

634 The conversion of the Manga chief to Catholicism has not engendered
many problems for his pagan subjects. The chief's primary duty—to begin
797 the yearly ceremonial cycle of sacrifices to the ancestors—has been taken over
769 by his father's brother, who is now considered the ritual head of the chiefly
[602] lineage. Nevertheless, to the chief still accrue the gains of this ceremony be-
cause his followers pay him homage and bring him gifts on his birthday,
which comes at this period. Moslems in the community also pay their re-
spects at this time, and they prefer his Catholic birthday celebration to the
bloody sacrifices of chickens to the ancestors. On the other hand, the chief
shows little of the common Catholic disapproval of Moslems and sends gifts
to their leaders on the Moslem feast days. He also entertains the district
Moslems when they come to pay him homage.

797 The Catholic chief does not act as a pivot in the exchange of wives be-
634 tween pagans of his lineage and the other lineages. This task now falls to his
582 father's brothers. Nevertheless, as district chief he is constantly involved
with the marital problems involving pagan parents and their Catholic chil-
dren. The main source of the difficulty is that Catholic girls are encouraged
to refuse to join their pagan husbands when so ordered by their parents. The
mission not only insists that the girl freely choose her own husband, but en-
courages her to reject a polygynous union. Catholicism thereby interposes it-
[562] self between the girls and their society, not only impairing the prestige of
their fathers and lineages but also giving the girls more freedom than they
would ordinarily possess.

The pagans claim that by encouraging girls to choose mates without
parental consent, the Catholics are really taking the opportunity to obtain
wives for young Catholic men. Paradoxically, there seems to be some truth
in this, since Bouniol, a White Father, states:

A Mossi who is unable to acquire a wife by [traditional] means must either remain
unmarried or seduce another man's wife . . . they must choose between celibacy and
immorality.

Such a state of affairs creates many problems for the missions, especially as the
system is recognized and sanctioned by the colonial authorities. . . . Young native
Christians are obviously placed in a very awkward position. Their conversion angers
their parents, who refuse to give them a wife; neither will their friends bestow a daughter
upon them, because they know that they will not receive one in return, since a Christian
may not give a daughter in marriage to a pagan. . . . Consequently, unless the mission-
aries help them to find a wife, they must remain unmarried—a very discouraging prospect!
(1920:160 italics mine)

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When a young Catholic receives a wife through the mission, he may visit her father and pay the customary respect by giving him kola-nuts and brass coins. The father of a mission girl may accept or reject his son-in-law as he sees fit, but formerly he could not defy the power of the missions. 797 582 634

A pagan youth who wishes to marry one of the mission girls has to discuss the matter with the priests and swear publicly that he will become a Christian. Before 1946 the young man had to fulfill his promise or be intimidated by the chief and the missionaries until he relented or fled the district. Today, however, the priests usually abandon their efforts to obtain the conversion of the young men after three months have passed. In some cases the young men take their wives and move to other districts, and return only after the girls have given up Catholicism. Despite the lure of wives from the mission, not many young men become Christians on this account because the Mossi are still concerned primarily with family relationships and the effect that conversion would have on these relationships. [596]

The church's prohibition of polygyny is by far the most serious bar to the spread of Catholicism. Many men do not adopt Catholicism simply because they fear that monogamous marriages would not produce children. Father Paternot (Considine 1954:103) has cited a study purporting to show that Christian Mossi have more children than the pagans, but the ordinary people of the district would not accept the facts he presented. They cite their personal experience to the contrary. Dim Delobson (1934:136), a Mossi converted to Catholicism, states: 797 595 842

A certain number of Christians of my acquaintance whose wives did not have children during the first years of marriage had recourse to magical practices in order to get children. These simple people thought that although they had an omnipotent God beside them, they could impudently—after all the good priests will not know about it—ask the little, but also powerful gods to grant them some material favors here on earth. When the gods given children were taken for Holy Baptism, they were given Christian names instead of the names of the earth shrines, and they did not wear magical charms which would have indicated to the priest the real state of affairs. Nevertheless, the children were bathed in water to which magical potions were added, and when the mothers went to visit their parents, sacrifices of chickens were given to the benevolent Tenghougas.

The Mossi's strong desire for children is admittedly one of the main reasons for leaving the Catholic Church so that they can take other spouses in addition to barren ones. The church has now belatedly recognized this problem and, knowing that it cannot prevent men from taking plural wives, allows them to come to church but prohibits them from taking the Mass.

Many cultural factors besides the desire for children make polygyny important for the Mossi, and make conversion detrimental to the functioning of their family system. Because of lineage opposition to their conversions, some converts are forced to establish nuclear households—a practice out of harmony with the normal rhythm of Mossi life. The reason for this disharmony is that Mossi women married to Catholics must work alone instead of with [595] 797 182 [594]

595 co-wives and other women of the extended families. Even the Catholic hus-
797 bands would not help their wives with household tasks requiring more than
182 one person, nor would they violate tradition by chatting with their wives
except at night in their butts. Another factor is that after the Mossi Christian
[846] woman has given birth to a child, she follows the traditional custom and goes
back to her parents' home to remain there during the two or three years' lactation period. This imposes a great hardship on a Catholic husband because during this time he is left without wife or helpmate. In the extended family household there would have been women to take care of a man's material needs, and his mistresses would have taken care of his sexual needs. The Catholic can and does ask the mission for a young girl to take care of his material needs, but of course she is not expected to satisfy his sexual desires. Obviously this arrangement is not satisfactory, and many Catholic men,
[837] with the acquiescence of their wives, keep mistresses. Dim Delobson comments:

Quagadougou has a large number of Christians, but does this mean that these people in their love for the church respect all her rules? Alas! there are a large number of Christians who oblige their lawful wives to leave the conjugal couch and make way for the accommodation of mistresses . . . in conformity with the old custom. But this is a subject which is too delicate to discuss further. I only note it in passing: *Noli me tangere* (1934:169).

797 Despite the influence of tradition on Mossi Catholics, I feel it would be a
794 mistake to say that the complexity of Catholic dogma is one of the drawbacks to missionary success in this country. One Mossi has already been made a bishop of the Catholic Church, and most of the proselytizing in Manga falls on the two Mossi priests and the five Mossi nuns. Under the supervision of two White Fathers, the Catholic children and adults are acquainted with the dogma and rituals of the church. The festivals are well attended and celebrated with as much pomp as possible. Although the Mass is sung in Latin, the Mossi have adapted some of their traditional tunes to the Mass, and use their own language for prayers and hymns. Catholics observe all the sacraments including Confession—a sacrament which is hazardous from the Mossi point of view, because man must lay bare his innermost thoughts to the priests, who, in the final analysis, are Europeans and thus administrators.

It is true that even the staunchest Catholics in Manga have not abandoned all belief in traditional rituals and religious credos. For example, many
[754] Mossi Catholics believe in the existence of sorcerers, but the Catholic Church does not recognize the existence of sorcerers or such evil forces (I have met White Fathers who believe that there are unexplainable psychic and physical phenomena in Africa), and moreover has no way of dealing with them. "But," says Dim Delobson (1934:136), "the Mossi believe so strongly in the power of such entities, that even those converted to Christianity cannot always escape the action of malevolent practitioners." The result is that many Catholics desert the church when they believe that only traditional specialists can help them with personal problems. Catholic families easily aban-

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don Christianity when told by shamans that to do so is necessary in order to have children. Unfortunately, the panoply of saints in modern French Catholicism does not seem to be able to syncretize with or displace the local deities, and thus come to the aid of the Mossi. This weakness of modern Catholicism in West Africa appears to make it unable to deal with many of the insecurities which arise in the daily lives of its adherents. 797 794

The American Protestant missionaries were never able to establish stations in either Manga or Nobéré because of the relative strengths of Catholicism and Islam in these two districts. However, they do have stations in Po and Koumbri, 30 and 50 miles away. The 1954 census lists five Protestants in Manga, but I could find only one family head who had been a Protestant and that during the period when he worked for missionaries. It is interesting to note that when he returned to his native Manga he did not become a Catholic but embraced Islam instead. Although Protestants among the Mossi are trying very hard, they are working under three handicaps: (1) the opposition of the local administration, (2) their own explicit cultural bias, and (3) the puritanical nature of their brand of American Midwestern Protestantism. 797

The first Protestant missionaries to arrive in 1926 reported: "There has often been opposition to the preaching of the Gospel in the district, and there is a continual under-current which has hindered many from accepting Christ" (Assemblies of God Mission 1934:14). Americans who wished to train the young Mossi to read and write found official opposition to the use of the vernacular for such purposes, and were obliged to receive French teaching certificates. When one recognizes that in those days less than one-tenth of one percent of the Mossi children were in schools (today the number is just over three percent) one cannot help feeling that any kind of education would have been useful to the Mossi. During the war the Pétain-oriented administration restricted the movements of the Americans and frightened off their converts. And finally, the Americans come under the general disapprobation with which the Mossi view most Europeans. [871] [609]

American Protestants are fairly well insulated from the Mossi population, and have only now begun to show any interest in Mossi culture and problems. Geoffrey Gorer, who visited the Mossi in 1935, wrote:

There were some American missionaries in this village, a whole family living in a house filled with texts; I do not know what creed they preached, or with what success; they looked more like American missionaries than I had thought anyone could have done off the films . . . they spoke with a dispassionate "none of our business" disapproval of the ill treatment of the negroes, who they said were ruled entirely by fear (1935:149).

Many of the Protestant missionaries who are now working with the Mossi are still inclined to agree with the first missionaries' ethnocentric judgement of their customs:

Moral standards are very low. Nothing is wrong until it is found out. Chastity is unknown . . . we questioned in vain many natives in search of a suitable Mossi word for "virgin." They all declared there was no such word in their language. . . . Many

797 horrifying and degrading customs of theirs, we would not dare to put in print (*Assemblies of God Mission* 1934:12).

Given such reactions, it is not surprising that the Protestants take no opportunity to use "heathen" beliefs and practices to further their own work. When they do take an interest in village affairs, it is usually to aid some young woman having marital difficulties with her lineage members (Sanders 1953:43). Since most Mossi problems are ultimately concerned with women, one can take it as a general rule that they are not in sympathy with any religious system which aggravates this problem.

The American Protestants have the most puritanical religious regime of all the proselyting religions in this country. The Catholics forbid polygyny, and the Moslems prohibit the use of alcohol; but the American Protestants forbid polygyny, drinking native beer, smoking cigarettes, and chewing kola nuts. The result is that the Protestants find it difficult to gain converts, and are constantly weeding out "rice Christians" from their mission stations. One young Catholic informant said that he was very impressed with the Americans who drove up in their big cars and straightway "cried out the Evangelists." Asked why the missionaries did not get converts, he said that the Mossi were afraid of whites. This response, while true, is inadequate, but as one former Protestant said to me, "With the Americans one can do nothing." So far the American Protestants have made little progress and it is safe to predict that the puritan brand of American Protestantism is not going to make much headway among the Mossi.

The old pagan priest, seeing the steady advance of the new religious systems, tells the visitor that the traditional ways of the ancestors are disappearing and that now the Mossi must follow one of three ways: Allah (Islam), Péredamba soré (Catholicism), or Americadamba soré (Protestantism). He is sad to see this happen, but even his grandchildren are now Moslems. In the struggle between Catholicism and Islam for adherents it is the general consensus that Islamic conversions are on the increase. Islam is gaining, not only because of the reasons already cited but also because the political situation, which has greatly changed since the Brazzaville conference in 1944, is still rapidly changing. Today the Moslems are gaining twenty converts to every Catholic convert, largely because the Mossi do not now fear official sanctions.

797 For example, the Manga mission installed a Mossi catechist in Nobéré with
798 the avowed purpose of gaining converts among Moslem and pagan children enrolled at the new state-run school. The people of the district initially refused to give their land for such a station, but were overruled by the administration through the chief. Although the teacher is a Catholic, he has not dared to encourage any of his students to join the church. The one pagan child who showed an interest in Catholicism was immediately ostracized and beaten by the other students. Shortly afterward, many Moslem parents attempted to withdraw their children from the school, claiming that the children could not attend Koranic classes and the public schools at the same time. But the teacher, realizing the source of their fear, told them that the school

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would remain entirely secular in nature. The Imam at Nobéré is positive that now the White Fathers do not have "force" behind them, no conversions will be made in the district. He said that the Moslems here do not rely on force to convert the pagans, and leave them alone if they resist persuasion to embrace Islam. 797 798

Mossi politicians who, for the most part, were trained by the Catholics and are still supported by the church, are careful not to offend their pagan and Moslem constituents. One internationally-known Mossi politician told a Nobéré audience that he had a Moslem name in addition to his Catholic name, and that he even attended a Koranic school. Although this admission did not help him gain the votes of the Moslems, he carried the district because he was supported by the chief and received the votes of the pagans. The politicians are now under pressure from the people to expand the system of public schools so that the road to social mobility, through education, would be open to pagans and Moslems as well as Catholics. Even in Manga, where the government-supported parochial school is adequate for the school population, there are plans to build a public school. The special prerogative of the mission schools to use noncertificated personnel on their teaching staffs is now being attacked by teachers who themselves were trained in these schools. These teachers are demanding that the government either cease paying salaries to the unqualified teachers in the mission schools or else employ similar persons in the public schools. Thus one of the most important channels through which the Catholics obtained converts is being consciously narrowed. 797 871

CONCLUSION

The spread of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara is one of the significant cultural events in this area. Islam is not only spreading at the expense of the indigenous religious systems, but is taking precedence over Christianity brought to Africa by the conquering Europeans. The reasons cited for the success of Islam over Christianity are legion. They include: the adaptability of Islam in contrast to the rigidity of Christianity (Greenberg 1946:70; Goilly 1952:173; Marty 1917:283); the simplicity of Islamic doctrines, as opposed to the complexity of Christianity (Delafose 1931:236; Quellien 1910:38-39); and the "imponderable factors" brought about by European conquest (Goilly 1952:261-266). 797

In this paper I have shown that Islam has made greater progress than has Christianity among the Mossi because:

(1) Christianity has a negative appeal to the Mossi because it was brought by their conquerors. For the proud Mossi, Christianity is intimately linked with their first real invasion, defeat, and occupation by aliens in their long history. In contrast, Islam has penetrated the country by peaceful means after its initial failure at proselytization by means of the jihad.

(2) In the early period of this century, the European administration recruited Mossi men and women for forced labor at home and in the Ivory Coast, and recruited children for the mission schools. But as soon as forced

797 labor was abolished and the Mossi could do as they wished, mission school and church attendance declined, and the Mossi mothers even refused to attend the Catholic maternity clinics. During this entire period, the Moslems were propagating the ideas that recruitment for forced labor and other injustices would cease only when all the Mossi embraced Islam.

(3) Catholicism attempted to break down the Mossi social system during the period when their political system was rendered practically impotent. But while the Mossi could not forcibly oppose the effects of French policy on their political system, they effectively neutralized the church's attempts to disrupt their social system. In contrast to Catholicism, Islamic practices and tenets harmonized with many aspects of the Mossi social system, especially with regard to polygyny and the status of women. Many Mossi converted to Islam in order to fulfill the prescriptions of pagan shamans, who linked conversion with the acquisition of children to continue the lineage. Christianity did not admit the existence of the traditional supernatural forces, and evolved no techniques for dealing with the Mossi's belief in the efficacy of such forces. In the sphere of social mobility, Islam permitted the most illiterate emancipated serf to make a pilgrimage and return an honored El Hadj, while only the most brilliant scholar is able to become an official in the Catholic community.

(4) More of the young men who leave their homes to serve in the armed forces or spend long periods away as laborers return as Moslems than as Christians. There is, however, no evidence that the increased Islamization of the Mossi is due to the heavy seasonal migration of young men to Ghana and Ivory Coast.

(5) American Protestantism, although not associated with French administrative policy, was negatively received because its missionaries were Europeans (whites). Furthermore, the extremely intolerant Protestant attitude toward the traditional Mossi religion and the puritanical nature of their religion made their efforts at conversion highly unsuccessful.

(6) The increase of public schools is lessening the importance of Catholicism and the Catholic school as the only means of social mobility through education. The newly emancipated pagan and Moslem masses are forcing the Catholic-trained Mossi politicians to act in the interest of their constituents, even if at the expense of the missions and Catholicism. The Catholics have consecrated the first Mossi bishop and have installed him in his see, but the return of each plane-load of Mossi Hadjis from Mecca spreads Islam into the remotest villages.

NOTES

114 ¹ This article is an expanded version of a paper read at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, 1957. The field work on which this analysis is based was conducted among the Mossi of Ouagadougou from November 1955 to January 1957, and was made possible by a Fellowship from The Ford Foundation African Studies Program. Needless to say, all ideas contained herein are my own. During these months among the Mossi I lived both in the predominantly Moslem district of Nobéré, and in the district of Manga, which has a fairly

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large Catholic population. I am indebted to Conrad Arensberg, Joseph Greenberg, Marvin Harris, and Ben Zimmermann for many helpful suggestions. 114

* Tauxier (1912:792) reports that when he visited Pirigui village, situated to the north of Ouagadougou, he was surprised to discover that almost half of the nobles were Moslems. It is highly probably that here, also, were the descendants of a son of Sagha who replaced a dissident chief.

* These figures are only approximate since many thousands of persons are unreported. Again, many persons listed as Moslems are pagans who have taken Moslem names for ritual purposes.

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